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Review of “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus”

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Book Review

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Ludwig Wittgenstein, C. K. Ogden Trans. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1999, pp. 7-125. Introduction by B. Russell pp.7-23, Preface: pp.27-28, Index: pp. 109-125 \$7.95. Originally published in (1922), London: Kegan Paul Ltd.

This Dover edition of the *Tractatus* is an unabridged republication of the English translation by C. K. Ogden and the Introduction by Bertrand Russell. It includes the index from the 1955 printing by Kegan and Paul and a Publisher's Note.

The *Tractatus* is generally regarded as one of the most influential works in 20th C. analytic philosophy and thousands of pages have been devoted to its content. See Ramsey's review (1932) for arguably the best short summary and critique. This review will just consider the rationale for choosing this reissue of the *Tractatus*. On my view, there are two important considerations.

First, one might prefer the 1961 translation of the *Tractatus* by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness to the Ogden translation. Well-known texts on Wittgenstein list the Pears and McGuinness translation instead of the Ogden translation in their bibliographies (e.g. Diamond (1991) and Hacker (1996)). The difference in the translations has exegetical implications.

For example, the German expression '*Tatsachen*' is rendered in both translations as 'facts', but the German expression '*Sachverhaltes*' is translated in Ogden as 'atomic facts' and in the Pears and McGinnis as 'states of affairs'. The latter translation is consistent with the one in my Cassell's German Dictionary. The philosophical cash value of the different treatments of '*Sachverhaltes*' is that since atomic facts seem to be a subclass of facts, and since facts (whatever is the case) are of the actual world, *Sachverhaltes* are also of the actual world. This suggests that Wittgenstein's ontology encompasses only what is actual and does not include merely possible facts. By rendering '*Sachverhaltes*' as 'states of affairs', the Pears and McGinnis translation accommodates an understanding of Tractarian metaphysics according to which there are merely possible worlds, i.e. worlds composed of states of affairs, which are merely possible facts (an understanding defended in, among other places, Bradley 1992). On this view *Tatsachen*, for Wittgenstein are a subclass of *Sachverhaltes*. It is hard to assign this view to Wittgenstein by the lights of the Ogden translation. Hence, those who view the metaphysics in the *Tractatus* as essentially modal tend to favor the Pears and McGuinness translation.

In order to make things a little more concrete, consider the following from the Ogden translation.

1. The world is everything that is the case.

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

So the totality of facts (*tatsachen*) is everything that is the case. Later on we read the following.

2 What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts (*Sachverhalten*).

2.01 An atomic fact (*Sachverhalt*) is a combination of objects (entities, things).

Russell elaborates as follows.

Facts which are not compounded of other facts are what Mr. Wittgenstein calls *Sachverhalte*, whereas a fact which may consist of two or more facts is called a *Tatsache*: thus, for example, “Socrates is wise” is a *Sachverhalt*, as well as a *Tatsache*, whereas “Socrates is wise and Plato is his pupil” is a *Tatsache* but not a *Sachverhalt*” p. 9.

In the Pears and McGuinness we have the following.

2. What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.

2.01 A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things).

This reading of the German makes it easier to say that for Wittgenstein states of affairs exist, but only some of them are facts. In other words: there are merely possible arrangements of things, e.g. that Socrates is Plato’s pupil, only some of which obtain and qualify as facts. One complication is that Wittgenstein frequently talks of the existence and nonexistence (*Bestehen and Nichtbestehen*) of *Sachverhalten*. For example,

2.06 Das Bestehen und Nichtbestehen von Sachverhalten ist die Wirklichkeit. (Das Bestehen von Sachverhalten nennen wir also eine positive, das Nichtbestehen eine negative Tatsache)

We may follow Black (1964, p. 39) and render *Bestehen and Nichtbestehen* in this context as the holding and non-holding states of affairs. Against the Ogden translation, it is natural to regard a “fact that doesn’t exist or doesn’t hold” as no fact at all. The Pears and McGuinness translation of *Sachverhalten* allows us to say that *Socrates is wise* holds and is therefore a *Tatsache*, whereas *Socrates is Plato’s pupil* is a *Sachverhalt* that does not hold and, therefore, is not a *Tatsache*. Reality is comprised of states of affairs (i.e. possible facts), only some of which obtain. However, I am not sure what to make of *möglicher Sachverhalte* (e.g. 2.013), a possible state of affairs, on the Pears and McGuinness translation. Should this be read as a possible possible fact?

The issues surrounding the correct translation of the *Tractatus* are complex. The aim of the above is to give the reader a sense of what is involved in using the Dover edition to work through the *Tractatus*. For a readable commentary on the pros and cons of the Ogden Translation see Black (1964). I agree with both Anscombe (1959) and Black (1964) that one persuasive consideration in favor of the Ogden translation is that Wittgenstein had the opportunity to correct the Ogden translation and he approved the final version (see Wittgenstein (1973). I now to turn to a second issue worth thinking about in purchasing the Dover edition of the *Tractatus*.

Surprisingly, the Dover edition abandons the strategy of placing the original side by side with the translations. We have just the English here. Given the above, the rationale for this is not obvious. This will disappoint scholars interested in updating their Ogden translations. Also, it has been my experience

teaching the *Tractatus* that undergraduate and graduate students do not find the German distracting. Indeed, some know enough German to make the German text useful in getting at what Wittgenstein is up to in various places in the *Tractatus*. In the opinion of this reviewer, the fact that the Dover edition does not include the German text makes it less valuable for scholarly and pedagogical purposes than, say, the Routledge 1999 reprint of the Ogden translation, which has the German.

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